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### A Right Brained Computer Teacher

My professional teaching career began in 1969 and ended in 2005. I never received a Master's because of my many interests, so my 76 semester graduate units reflect not just one area of expertise, but a huge variety of interests all pertaining to education. Many of these college courses over the years were computer or computer education based.

My first introduction to computers in 1981 was a class offered at our local high school in Colville, Washington, as a weekend class and taught by a math teacher who wanted to share his excitement with this new educational wonder. Two of my fifth grade teaching colleagues and I attended his class and learned a new language - Basic. I don't recall actually understanding what this new language skill would do for me or my students, but I knew it was the look of the future, and I wanted to be a part of it. Shortly after our indoctrination to these new devices, our elementary school had its first computer "lab". That was after a formal "begging process" to the very reluctant school board.

As I recall we managed to appropriate 10 Texas Instrument TI-99's which we set up on tables in a very large closet off the library. My fellow teachers and I began the process of showing our young learners how to write simple commands with our new-found language. I also remember vividly the students loved the game "Munch Man", a similar game to Pac Man. Nothing like a video game to grab a kid's attention.

This lab grew over the next few years and more of our colleagues jumped on board which made the use of the devices available to more of the school population.

A move took me to California where I took a position as an 8th grade English teacher. I vividly remember sitting in a teachers' meeting and hearing a request for the need of yearbook co-ordinator. Since I had been my high school yearbook editor and supervised the book at my previous school, I found my hand going up to volunteer. What I didn't know was this book (school year 1987-88) was to be generated mostly by computer. The yearbook company had recently developed guidelines and some templates for a yearbook staff. I was in way over my head. As the co-ordinator, I was given my own computer - a Classic Macintosh. This was a one piece computer with a floppy drive. Believe me, the learning curve began. It was an engaging year working with older students and involving them in the new process of yearbook publication. The book was successful, which led to two more years as coordinator.

What I didn't know at the time of my hand flying up to volunteer, was how much this new "toy" was to affect my next 15 years of teaching. After this brief introduction to computer use, I was light years ahead of all of my colleagues. My confidence had grown and my curiosity for all things "computer" had doubled.

At this time in my career I began teaching in international schools. For the next 10 years (all of the 90's) I would find myself instructing in many different situations on three continents. My first overseas assignment was in England just outside of London. This K-12 American school had three computer labs - one for each level. I became the number one friend of the computer teacher and quickly involved my 6th grade students with the lab.

My students began to learn how to enter their written pieces, change fonts, change page set ups, and insert clip art. They learned how to make banners and posters. The lab was always available for my classes since very few teachers were willing to investigate the possibilities it had to offer.

Two years later I found myself raising my hand again in a staff meeting while teaching in northern Spain. Our very small international school of 60 students and 8 teachers was housed on the campus of an established private Spanish school. There was a lab available for our students - ages five to sixteen- to use. Once more I volunteered.

Again I was in over my head. What was I going to do with the high school students in a computer lab? Why had I done this? I hadn't even seen the lab, and I soon found out it was not a Mac lab, and the keyboards were made for the Spanish language. I figured out the keyboard issues and developed curriculum for all the levels which took hours of time in this "foreign" (meaning PC not Mac) lab. The older students were actually the easiest to plan for as they helped me adapt some logical uses of the lab for them and for the other levels. We learned together. They typed their papers and were often available to help me with the younger students. There was very little of the Web at that time, but there was email which was the first introduction of this new powerful use of computers to me. We had one email address for the school, and initial use of it began as there were so few people who had an email address so the use of it was minimal.

Kuwait was the next international setting for me. I was there for four years (1994-98) and became the lower school computer teacher of the Mac lab starting my second year there. The lab consisted of 26 Power Macintosh 5500's. My students ranged from five to eleven years of age. The lower school had 300 students, and I met with each of their classes twice a week. I was saved by the software developed by Mac and my immediate supervisor who eased me into running a lab of this size. Apple focused on education from the beginning and created a myriad of educational software for all ages. I relied heavily on this software for all of the levels. There were programs developed for

typing, drawing, desktop publishing, interactive books and specific subject areas.

Because the computers in the lab were not networked, I remembered hours of loading software to each of the computers. Each computer seemed to have its own issues to which I became quite accustomed.

I remember a rather funny anecdote when one of my youngest classes started their first computer class. One of the little five year olds was trying to make the mouse work. I saw her out of the corner of my eye running the mouse across the screen, then over the top of the console to make the clicking produce an action. She was way ahead of her time as now the touch on the screen makes everything happen.

This lab experience was the first time that I realized the amazing possibilities of the linking of a classroom study to further enrichment in the lab. There was software to use for such integration, research on the web, and desktop publishing available as well. I had been a classroom teacher for all the levels I was working with, so integrating and working with individual teachers made my job fulfilling and quite meaningful.

There were more labs for me to cover and more stories of software and computer integration, but for now I believe this focuses on my early use of these wonderful machines we call computers.

I am not particularly left brained and never fully embraced how these marvelous devices actually worked. I didn't and still don't really want to know. I just wanted to know

what they could do, and after I figured it out, I wanted to share it with as many students and fellow teachers as I could.